THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • THURSDAY • MARCH 21, 2024 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 20 • LATE CITY EDITION

EYE ON INFLUENCERS

Watch what you post, say poll officials

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

IF you are an influencer or have a large number of followers on social media, be watchful of what you post or share, as the Election Commission officials are watching you closely.

Any hate speech, setting narratives or influencing voters will be dealt with sternly as over the years, social media has gained the centrestage in election campaigns and reaching out to voters, said Election Commission officials.

The Commission has made a list of 300 social media influencers at the state level, while officials at the district level are still compiling the list, said AV Suryasen, special officer, IT and Media, office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO). CONTINUED ON: P7

ECI to act against Shobha, Union min retracts remarks

Her statement generalises TN people as extremists: DMK plaint

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE Election Commission officials are examining a complaint by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leaders, seeking action against Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje for alleging that a person from Tamil Nadu was responsible for the blast at The Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru on March 1. Karandlaje, who is contesting as a BJP candidate from the Bengaluru North Lok Sabha constituency, retracted her remarks and issued an apology.

The Election Commission on Wednesday directed the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Karnataka to take immediate and appropriate action on the DMK's complaint about the alleged violation of the Model Code of Conduct. In its complaint to the ECI, the DMK said the minister's statement generalised the people of Tamil Nadu as "extremists".

During a protest against an attack on a shopkeeper in Bengaluru for playing devotional songs, the BJP leader had said that law and order in Karnataka has deteriorated and people who come from Tamil Nadu are planting bombs.

Her remarks had drawn sharp criticism from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and other leaders. Stalin demanded legal action against her and also urged the ECI to immediately initiate stringent action. Madurai police on Wednesday booked a case against the BJP leader for "promoting enmity" between different groups.

"We received the ECI directions with a copy of the complaint. We are examining the complaint and will initiate action as per law and ECI directions," Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Karnataka, Manoj Kumar Meena told *TNIE*. P4

MCC VIOLATION: FIR LIKELY AGAINST HEBBALKAR FOR ORGANISING MEET

Belagavi: Election Commission officials are likely to take up a case against Women and Child Welfare Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar for allegedly preparing to hold a meeting with anganwadi workers at a community hall here on Wednesday. The officials raided the hall and stopped the meeting immediately for violating the model code of conduct. P4

SCALE OF INEQUALITY

Group	INCOME Avg income (₹)	INCOME Share (%)	WEALTH Average wealth (₹)	WEALTH Share (%)
Average	2,34,551		11,40,029	
Bottom 50%	70,163	15.0	1,73,104	6.4
Middle 40%	1,65,273	27.3	9,63,560	28.6
Top 10%	13,52,905	57.7	87,70,132	65.0
Top 1%	53,00,549	22.6	54,141,525	40.1

*As of 2022-23

Source: World Inequality Lab

1922 13% of national income pocketed by the top 1%

1982 6.7% of national income went to the top 1%

2022 * 22.6% of national income with top 1%

'Inequality today worse than under British Raj'

DIPAK MONDAL @New Delhi

INDIA is more unequal now than it was under the British rule, says a paper released by Paris-based World Inequality Lab. The report, co-authored by Nitin Kumar Bharti, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, and Anmol Somanchi, also recommends a 2% super tax on the net wealth of the wealthiest families to generate resources for public investment.

The report says top-end inequality peaked between 2014-15 and 2022-23, driven by wealth concentration. By 2022-23, India's top 1% income and wealth shares (22.6% and 40.1%) were at their highest historical levels. For context, the US's top 1% income share was 21%.

The report cautions such high levels inequality could trigger concentration of income and wealth, which could in turn negatively influence the society and the government at large.

To arrive at these conclusions, the inequality report has taken into consideration the national income accounts, wealth aggregates, tax tabulations, rich lists, and surveys on income, consumption, and wealth. The report calls for a restructuring of India's tax system to account for both income and wealth. It also stresses on the need for generating resources for investments in health and education to enable the common man to benefit from the ongoing wave of globalisation.

The government should tap India's wealthiest families to generate resources for public investments, it says, adding that India's 167 wealthiest families in 2022-23 would yield 0.5% of national income in revenues.

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Petitions in SC as govt notifies fact check unit ahead of polls

RAKESH KUMAR & PARVEZ SULTAN @New Delhi

AHEAD of the general elections, the government on Wednesday notified the Fact Check Unit under the Press Information Bureau to monitor content on social media tied to the Centre. The unit was notified under the 2021 IT Rules.

According to the new regulation, if a government information is misrepresented on any online platform, the fact-checking unit will flag it. Social media platforms and other online intermediaries will then decide on taking down the content. If they refuse to drop the content, they risk losing the protections granted under Section 79 of the IT Act. This section provides immunity to online platforms from content posted by users and third parties.

The notification comes a week after the Bombay High Court rejected a petition filed by Editors Guild of India and others against the fact checker. They argued that the regulations could lead to censorship of free speech in the country.

The Editors Guild has now filed a petition before the Supreme Court. "We remain opposed to it because I don't think that in a democratic country like us, the government alone can decide what is fake information," said Editors Guild general secretary Ruben Banerjee. Political satirist Kunal Kamra, too, has moved the SC.

EXPRESS READ

Woman, twin sons found dead in JP Nagar

Bengaluru: A 50-year-old woman and her twin sons, aged 28, were found dead at their house in JP Nagar on Wednesday morning. Their burnt bodies were found in the bedroom but there was no evidence of petrol or LPG gas leakage. The police have not ruled out the possibility of suicide, and are waiting for the autopsy and forensic reports to ascertain the exact cause of death | P5

Modi nudges Putin, Zelenskyy to resolve conflict through talks

YESHI SELI @New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday used the opportunity of greeting Vladimir Putin on his re-election as Russian President by nudging him during their telephonic conversation to resolve the ongoing Ukraine war through dialogue and diplomacy. He had a similar message for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his separate conversation with him.

"I spoke with President Putin and congratulated him on his re-election and also agreed to work together to further deepen and expand India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership in the years ahead," Modi said.

"Both leaders expressed satisfaction with the consistent and dynamic development of mutually beneficial ties in trade, economy, energy, and

Narendra Modi | Vladimir Putin | Volodymyr Zelenskyy

transport," a Russian readout of the call said. "An exchange of views was also held on a number of issues on the international agenda, in particular in the context of the situation around Ukraine," the Kremlin's statement said.

President Putin conveyed his wishes to Modi for the successful conduct of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Modi is one of the few world leaders who have congratulated Putin for his re-election.

Speaking to Zelenskyy, Modi assured India will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, guided by its "people-centric" approach. The prime minister reiterated India's consistent support for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict. Zelenskyy thanked India for its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, humanitarian aid, and active participation in Peace Formula meetings. The two leaders discussed ways to further strengthen the partnership in various spheres.

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